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MEASURING DESTINATION IMAGE AND CONSUMER CHOICE CRITERIA: THE CASE OF MYKONOS ISLAND

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Destination image has long been identified as an environmental characteristic that influences consumer behaviour and choice. As destinations compete nowadays globally, marketers need to acquire new knowledge and a greater understanding of the business and the environment, in which they operate in order to determine and adopt an appropriate marketing mix. So, first research objective was to measure attitudes towards island of Mykonos in order to identify key dimensions and their relative importance in determining consumer choice. Then, Cluster analysis was performed in order to segment the market and identify different clusters of tourists. Four different clusters were identified based on choice criteria and attitudes. Results can be a valuable input for both marketers and practitioners.

Keywords: *destination image, destination choice, consumer choice criteria, Mykonos Island, tourism marketing*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is considered one of the world's largest, most dynamic economic sectors and fast growing industry (Nicolaou and Mas, 2005). Tourism is essential for a country's regional development (Buhalis, 1999), employment (Zaharatos, 1989), and the reduction of the prosperity gap between developed and developing countries (Jenkins, 1982).



Moreover, tourism is a main source of a country's income, its' balance payments, and is a determining factor in its trade deficit. Among the most popular regions as a tourist destination is Europe; WTO (2008) states that Europe is the first tourist destination worldwide holding for the year 2007 a 54% market share. As regards Greece, for the year 2006, according to the WTTC, travel and tourism is expected to generate 32.2 billion Euros of the economic activity; 20% of total employment; 16.4% of total Gross Domestic Product (GDP); 29.1% of total exports, 14.3% of total investments, and 8.0% of total government expenditures (WTTC, 2006). Amongst the most famous worldwide tourism destination in the Greek Aegean Archipelagos is the Island of Mykonos.

Given the competitiveness of the tourism industry, understanding the travelers' decision making process is of great interest to marketers (Currie and Wesley, 2008). The intense competition among destination areas has made major concern its marketing, increase of market share and ensured repeated visitation (Shukla et al., 2006). Determining factors that influence tourists choice of a destination is important in developing marketing strategies (Hsu et al., 2009), as well as the planning of public services. When a destination is able to meet the needs of a tourist it is perceived to be attractive and is likely to be chosen (Bramwell and Lane, 1993). Tourist decision behaviour is a rather complex procedure, strongly influenced by the attributes and characteristics of tourist destination as well as past experiences (Shukla et al., 2006). Liu (1999) suggests that the image of a destination is associated with tourist destination choice. A number of researchers suggest that the traveller's destination choice depends on how favourable is the image of the under consideration destination (Bigne et al., 2001; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Ahmed, 1991; Chon, 1990; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989; Hunt, 1975). Destination image is defined as the impressions that a person holds about a region in which he or she does not reside (Hunt, 1975).

Research of the past two decades has demonstrated that image is a valuable concept in understanding the destination selection process of tourists. Destination image has become a very important issue in the marketing research in the tourism industry, since many countries use promotion and global marketing to support their image and to compete with other destinations (Lin and Huang, 2008). There are numerous studies on tourist destination image. Some focus on measurement of the tourism destination image (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Driscoll et al., 1994; Styliadis et al., 2008), while others center on the components comprising the destination image (Dan, 1996; Mackay and Fesenmaier, 1997). Moreover, several studies focused on factors influencing tourist

destination image (Baloglu and Bringberg, 1997; Walmsley and Jenkins, 1993). Also, research has been undertaken on destination image and visitation intentions or preferences (Milman and Pizam, 1995; Goodrich 1978). Even though numerous studies have been conducted searching different aspects of destination image and destination choice, none of them has focused on Mykonos Island which is been considered as a worldwide famous tourist destination.

The image concept has generally been considered as an attitudinal construct consisting of an individual's mental representation of knowledge (beliefs), feelings, and global impression about an object or destination (Baloglu, 1998). So, this paper aims to investigate tourist attitudes towards the island of Mykonos and explore consumer's choice criteria. Objective of the study is to perform a first level segmentation based on the derived factors of destination image/ choice attributes. Destination marketers need a better understanding of how an image is formed and what determines the process. From a practical standpoint, this study provides important implications for strategic image management and development efforts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on primary data and is developed on two axons. The first one includes the qualitative research which was taken place in July 2007, based on ten tourist depth interviews with the laddering technique. The second axon includes the quantitative research of this study and it was taken place during the summer of 2008. This was accomplished by means of a questionnaire that had been constructed especially for this study.

Qualitative research

In order to solicit the opinions of a range of consumers, ten in-depth personal interviews were conducted, over a period of two months. A discussion topic guide was developed regarding destination of Mykonos attributes and vacations choice factors, according to the research objectives, and followed established protocol (Malhotra, 2004). A funnel approach was adopted, beginning with an exploration of the broad subject of destination attributes and formation of destination image followed by a more focused discussion of the elements that comprise choice factors in destination selection. Participants were asked to discuss the factors that influenced their choice of a destination, and their perceptions of the

marketing strategies that tourism marketers pursue. They were also encouraged to express their experiences at these destinations, including their likes and dislikes in terms of the marketing mix tools, the overall satisfaction, the reasons to visit or revisit a destination and general concerns about destinations with special reference to Mykonos island.

The findings of the primary research phase of this research provided some interesting insights about consumer attitudes towards destination image formation and choice criteria. The findings derived from the interviews showed that the most important reasons for destinations choice were “having fun”, “getting away from every day’s routine life” and for the ‘beautiful scenery’. Participants agreed that “night-life”, the “Availability of tourist land-marks”, the availability of “Quality deluxe hotels”, “shopping”, and “reliable transportation” are the main reasons for visiting the island of Mykonos. Moreover, sandy beaches, well known bars and restaurants and the presence of stars are attributes that comprise the image of the island. Finally, respondents expressed their opinion that advertising, word of mouth communication, previous experience and media such as magazines and the internet are the main sources of information about the island of Mykonos.

Quantitative research

Data were collected during the summer of 2008 via structured interviews. 300 consumers were initially randomly approached and invited to participate in the study. The tourists in the field research were selected using judgemental sampling method and questionnaires were gathered following the mall intercept personal interview technique (Malhotra, 2004). Participation was voluntary. The majority (224) agreed to contribute to the research. This sample size can be considered as satisfactory for the main statistical analysis utilized (Hair et al., 1998). The construction and phrasing of the structured questionnaire used in the quantitative research was based on previous researches and the literature review as well as on the results of qualitative research. The questionnaire included 36 items measuring consumer attitudes and destination image. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree of their agreement or disagreement with each item, using a five-point Likert-type scale (5 = totally agree, 1 = totally disagree). Moreover socioeconomic questions were selected in order to explore the tourist’s profile. All items were translated via a procedure of double-back translation. Questionnaire items were comprehensive and no complaints in terms of content and time constraints were expressed.

Statistical data analysis of the quantitative research

The statistical analysis included estimation of frequencies, percentages and means, reliability, factor and cluster analysis. The form of Factor analysis used was Principle Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax Rotation (Hair et al., 1998). As important variables in factor formation were considered those with factor loadings > 0.40 (Sharma, 1996). Also, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (K.M.O) is mentioned, which is an adequacy indicator of the sample and P.C.A. model implementation (Kinnear and Gray, 1995).

RESULTS

Sample profile

Of the sample, 48% were females and 52% males. Respondents' age ranged from under 19 to over 60, with approximately 29% of the sample representing the age group 18-25, 60% were 26-36, and 11% were more than 45 years old. Moreover, 72% were single, 24% married, and 4% were divorced, separated or widowed. Regarding country of residence 37% were from UK, 22% from Italy, 13% from Greece, 7% from Germany, 6% from France, 4% from Spain, and from other countries 11%. As to consumers' education, 46% had secondary education, 15% held a bachelor degree, and 39% held at least a Master degree. Lastly, regarding individual net monthly income, 21% earned up to 2000.00 Euros per month, 32% earned 2000.01-4000.00 Euros, and 47% more than 4000.01 Euros. Regarding previous visitation to Mykonos Island, 97.3% of the respondents had previously visited the island, while only 2.7% were first time visitors. For those that had come before to Mykonos Island, 83.3% had visited Mykonos Island up to 5 times, 13.0% 6-10 times and 3.7% more than 10 times. As to reasons for visiting Mykonos Island (yes-no answers), the three more frequent reasons were: for having fun (77.3%), getting away from the every day's routine life (52.7%), and for their yearly vacation (40.9%). The tourists were informed about Mykonos Island (yes-no answers), mainly from friends (83.6%), previous experience (44.5%), magazines (31.8%) and the internet (28.2%).

Image components leading to destination choice of Mykonos Island

Tourists were given a list of 36 destination image attributes referring to Mykonos Island and were asked to point in what extend these destination image attributes were the grounds for choosing Mykonos as a destination. Most favourable variables of destination image were: Nightlife (MS=4.48); Beautiful place (MS=4.23); Sun (MS=4.21); Beach bars (MS=4.08); Sandy beaches (MS=4.00) and; sexually wild place (MS=4.00).

The answers referring to the tourist's choice of Mykonos based on the 36 image attributes were subject to factor Analysis (Principle Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation). According to the criteria for numbers of factors, as those having eigenvalues greater than 1.0, PCA identified nine factors (K.M.O.= 0.777, B.T.S.= 4033.466, df=630; p= 0.00). All items had factor loading ≥ 0.45 on the factors, illustrating a good fit and accounting for 71.5% of the total variance. Reliability analysis was calculated for the scale in total; and item analysis was also performed in order to have a better picture in the questions cohesion. For the total instrument, reliability coefficient alpha was 0.909, which was considered satisfactory (Malhotra, 2004; Spector, 1992).

Identifying nine factors

Analysis of the results extracted a nine factor structure. It was then possible to name each factor and give a meaning to them in order to use the derived scale for validation and for further research purposes. The first factor derived from the analysis interpreted 11.9% of the total variance, composed of six variables and was named "Liberation of ethics" because it referred to the items that had to do with the liberation of all aspects of life, such as drug and alcohol consumption, nudism, and free relations. The second factor (9.1% of total variance) was named "Cosmopolitan Island", because the items referred to the life style of the visitors and was represented by four variables. The third factor named "Sexually Wild Place"; interpreted 8.8% of total variance, and was composed of five variables which referred to the sexually wild life on Mykonos Island. The fourth factor (8.3% of total variance) composed of three variables relevant to the cultural and historic attractions of the Mykonos Island, and was named "Historical and cultural attractions". The fifth factor (7.7% of total variance) was composed of five variables

relevant to the natural beauty of the island, and named “Scenery of Mykonos Island”. The sixth factor (7.3% of total variance), comprised of three variables relevant to the quality and variety of the Island’s attractions, and was named “Sightseeing”. The seventh factor named “Food and Shelter” interpreted 7.1% of total variance and was composed of three variables which referred mainly to the quality and variety of the Island’s restaurants and accommodation. The eighth factor (6.2% of the total variance), composed of five variables and was named “Island for a getaway” because it referred to the items that have to do with getting away from the routine and going to an entertaining and interesting place. Lastly, the ninth factor interpreted 4.9% of the total variance; composed of two variables and was named “Accessibility to the island” because it referred to the items that had to do with ease of access as well as behaviour of local people. Table 1 describes the factors.

Table 1. Factors extracted for the reasons that tourists choose Mykonos Island

Factors	Question-Item	Factor loading
1 st . <i>“Liberation of ethics”</i> 11.9% of the total variance explained	Free relations	0.813
	Liberated narcotics usage	0.785
	Liberated alcohol consumption	0.724
	Liberation of ethics	0.690
	Nudism	0.671
	To make acquaintances	0.517
2 nd . <i>“Cosmopolitan Island”</i> 9.1% of the total variance explained	Rich and famous place	0.813
	Presence of rich and famous people	0.783
	Acquaintance with VIPS	0.712
	Place full of fashion	0.502
3 rd . <i>“Sexual wild place ”</i> 8.8% of the total variance explained	Sexually wild place	0.733
	Nightlife	0.672
	Amusement	0.505
	Exotic place	0.503

	Place full of mystery	0.482
4 th “Historical and cultural attractions” 8.3% of the total variance explained	Historical attractions	0.883
	Cultural attractions	0.817
	Festival	0.537
5 th “Scenery of Mykonos Island” 7.7% of the total variance explained	Sun	0.790
	Sandy beaches	0.626
	The beach bars	0.584
	Climate	0.545
	Daily trips with the boats	0.513
6 th “Sightseeing” 7.3% of the total variance explained	Quality of attractions	0.852
	Variety of attractions	0.734
	Beautiful place	0.457
7 th “Food and Shelter” 7.1% of the total variance explained	Quality of restaurants	0.849
	Variety of restaurants	0.831
	Existence of suitable accommodations	0.496
8 th “Island for a getaway” 6.2% of the total variance explained	Entertaining place	0.568
	Absolute getaway	-0.556
	The powerful winds and dangerous sports	-0.524
	Interesting place	-0.503
	The hotels	-0.462
9 th “Accessibility to the island” 4.9% of the total variance explained	Easy access in the region	0.596
	Behavior of local residents	0.577

Sample: 226 (K.M.O. = 0.777, B.T.S. = 4033.466, df=630; $p = 0.00$). Total Cronbach Alpha: 0.909; Total variance explained: 71.5%

Cluster Analysis

Next step in the research was to perform a cluster analysis in order to segment the market and identify different segments of tourists based on choice criteria. In cluster analysis the nine factors, obtained from factor analysis, had been treated as independent variables. In order to identify groups of tourists with similar behaviour, a *K*-means cluster analysis algorithm was decided to be used. The four-cluster solution was selected as the most appropriate bearing in mind that these clusters must have practical and physical interpretation. By implementing this procedure, the number of cases in each cluster were determined as follows: cluster 1=52 tourists; cluster 2=62; cluster 3=52; and cluster 4= 52 tourists. Due to missing values, eight cases were not assigned to any of the three clusters (Table 2).

Table 2. Cluster analysis of the knowledge factors

Image/ Destination Factors	Choice	1st cluster, n=52	2nd cluster, n=62	3rd cluster, n=52	4th cluster, n=52	F ratio & Significance levels
<i>Liberation of ethics</i>		3.12	1.79	3.56	2.97	F=89.582 (p=0.000)
<i>Cosmopolitan island</i>		2.87	1.94	3.87	3.38	F=93.173 (p=0.000)
<i>Sexual wild place</i>		3.41	3.14	4.28	3.42	F=49.711 (p=0.000)
<i>Historical and cultural attractions</i>		2.99	2.23	3.37	1.78	F=73.154 (p=0.000)
<i>Sea and sun attribute of Mykonos Island</i>		3.79	3.43	4.52	3.71	F=49.972 (p=0.000)
<i>Quality and Variety of the Island's attractions</i>		3.22	3.47	4.03	3.76	F=18.592 (p=0.000)
<i>Restaurants and accommodation</i>		3.18	3.40	4.33	3.98	F=42.011 (p=0.000)
<i>Island for a getaway</i>		3.29	2.92	4.03	3.45	F=67.100 (p=0.000)
<i>Accessibility to the island</i>		3.31	3.03	3.94	3.33	F=17.674 (p=0.000)

Sample size: 218

Multivariate statistics indicated statistical significance difference between the two clusters and the results of ANOVA test also revealed internal validity of the cluster results and that all factors contributed to differentiate the four clusters; which in all cases was $p=0.00$. The Final Cluster Centers (FCC) regarding each cluster, as well as the sample size is presented in Table 2.

The first cluster is indifferent towards all factors assessing image of the island. The only factor that has a high FCC is the sea and sun related products of the island. The second cluster is compiled of 62 tourists, representing the 28.6% of the total sample size. This cluster has FCC ranging from 1.79 -3.47. This cluster selected Mykonos mainly for sea and sun, relaxation and entertainment. They are not surely interested in the “liberation ethics” part of Mykonos life, neither that Mykonos is a cosmopolitan island. They are interested in the quality and variety of the islands attractions, sea and sun product, the restaurants and accommodation. The third cluster is the one that chooses Mykonos, being favourable towards almost all factors of destination image. This cluster has eight out of nine $FCC > 3.50$ on the factors, while for the last factor, no.4, it is indifferent, i.e. $FCC=3.37$ (Historical and cultural attractions). The fourth cluster is firstly interested in restaurants and accommodations ($FCC=3.98$), secondly in quality and variety of the islands attractions ($FCC=3.76$) and lastly, in the sea and sun related product that Mykonos island gives ($FCC=3.71$). They are surely not interested in historical and cultural attractions and are indifferent towards the other image factors.

CONCLUSIONS

Understanding factors that influence consumer behaviour is of critical importance for marketing managers of the island under investigation. Effective management requires detailed knowledge about the theoretical background and the saliency of the dimensions underlying consumer decisions. Knowledge of what dimensions comprise consumer evaluation is a valuable input for tourism management information. In the present research, results showed that visitors of Mykonos Island consider attributes referring to natural beauty, infrastructure and the presence of well known places of amusement in order to choose the island as a destination. Cluster analysis revealed four different segments with almost similar preferences in terms of choice criteria. That means that visitors of Mykonos have almost universal criteria and expectations for visiting Mykonos. The only difference is the importance that place

different segments in the attributes that comprise the image of the island. So, marketers need to promote the island based on the nine factors extracted from the factor analysis in order to attract visitors to the island. Moreover, marketers need to invest on luxury hotels and places of amusement and to further develop the infrastructure of the island. The positioning strategy of the island should be based on the fun and luxury and the aura of the place as a destination that “everything can happen”. The island should be placed as a unique destination in relation with ethics, and tolerance. Marketers should continue to attract the star system and improve the cosmopolitan image of the island, so, they can promote the island through the presence of well known people and stars (VIP). Finally, according to the results they can promote the island as a destination for weekend trips, city breaks and short time vacations. Also, marketers of Mykonos should promote the proximity of the island to Athens and the easy of access to the island.

Tourism service industry is changing and the destinations which will be leaders in the global tourism industry in the future are not identifiable to us today. Therefore, the knowledge and understanding of consumer choice criteria and attitudes would be of great help both for academic and commercial reasons (Mamalis, 2008). This research even though it is exploratory in nature and employed a non-probability sampling method, it provides a useful source of information, which can be used by Greek marketers involved in the tourism industry, to help them better understand market and to explore attitudes and choice criteria of specific market segments.

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